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SUBJECT: MOBILIZING CIVIL SOCIETY TO ADVANCE A COMMON  
STRATEGIC VISION

REF: A. 08 CONAKRY 0814  
[1](#)B. 08 CONAKRY 0815  
[1](#)C. 08 CONAKRY 0822  
[1](#)D. CONAKRY 0039  
[1](#)E. CONAKRY 0036  
[1](#)F. CONAKRY 0031  
[1](#)G. CONAKRY 0024

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Three weeks after the December 23 coup d'etat, Guinean civil society has yet to emerge with strong leadership and a common strategic vision. Although they agree that a democratic election installing a civilian government is the end objective, they disagree as to what needs to happen to achieve that objective. Embassy is widely advocating the USG position, pushing for legislative elections within the next six months. Several strong voices that share the USG position have emerged, and Embassy is exploring ways to encourage these leaders in their efforts to bring civil society together, including through the Embassy's next Human Rights Working Group on January 23. There is a growing concern among Guineans and foreign observers alike that civil society's failure to coalesce may ultimately enable the military regime to maintain its grip on power, whether by design or by accident. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Over the course of the last few weeks, Poloff has been meeting with a wide range of civil society leaders in order to explain the USG's position with respect to the December 23 coup d'etat, as well as to get their respective views on what needs to happen in the months ahead. Some of these meetings were individually reported via reftels, and included discussions with leaders from political parties, unions, the Christian Council, and the National Council of Civil Society Organizations. In addition, Poloff met with a number of other contacts, including Dr. Macaulay Traore, a private businesswoman and the Minister of Social Affairs under former Prime Minister Souare; Yaya Kane, the head of a local NGO for the promotion of democracy; Dr. Mohamed Berete, a constitutional law expert and civil activist; Safioulaye Bah, the former Prefect of Mamou, and Thierno Balde, a youth leader and head of a human rights NGO.

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COMMON GOAL, ALTERNATE PATHS  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) Based on these discussions and the various declarations being put forth in the press by a wide range of civil society organizations, it is clear that Guinean civil society lacks a common strategic vision. Ultimately, they agree on the same end objective, a rapid return to civilian rule through credible elections, but they differ widely on how to achieve that goal. On one end of the spectrum are groups, such as the labor unions, who are calling for a complete overhaul to the constitution along with criminal trials for corrupt former government officials. Advocates of

this approach are in no hurry to get to elections. At the other end of the spectrum are most of the political parties, who are calling for legislative elections within the next six months. Most groups seem to agree that the total transition period should not exceed one year, but there are exceptions.

14. (SBU) With respect to elections, the issue of voter registration continues to surface as a major concern. Some contacts maintain that the biometric registration program funded by the EU and the UNDP is inherently flawed. Although the political parties are in favor of elections in six months, they almost certainly will not go to the polls if they believe that there is a problem with the registration process. They are expecting these issues to be resolved within the next few months, but EU and UNDP technical experts are privately indicating that the process will not be completed until well past June.

15. (SBU) Constitutional reform is another high priority for many civil leaders. Contacts are unwilling to move towards elections with a flawed constitution that provides the president with unequal powers. Dr. Berete, a constitutional law expert trained in Strasbourg, told Poloff that the constitution absolutely has to be revised before elections, but noted that it is "easy to do." He said that he and others have already worked up a draft that addresses the major issues. Rather than holding a constitutional referendum, which he felt would be too time consuming and expensive, he said that the new National Assembly's first order of business should be to adopt the new constitution, as drafted by civil society.

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ADVANCING THE USG AGENDA  
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16. (SBU) Poloff has been widely advocating the USG position, asserting that legislative elections must take place within six months, and that the CNDD's sole priority should be to achieve that goal. Issues such as constitutional reform, anti-corruption measures, and improved rule of law should be left to the new National Assembly as a legitimate democratic institution representing the interests of the people. Poloff has also emphasized that civil society must pull together with a common vision. Failure to do so provides the CNDD with unlimited opportunities to manipulate the political situation and maintain its grip on power in the long-term, either by design or by accident. This message has been met with mixed reactions.

17. (SBU) The reactions to the USG's decision to suspend foreign assistance have also been mixed. As expected, there has been criticism published in the press, which has been echoed by individual contacts during various meetings. However, there have also been a significant number of civilian contacts who have applauded the USG's position, saying that it is absolutely imperative for individual countries, but especially the United States, to adopt a tough stance in order to maintain international pressure. Dr. Traore commented that "the U.S. position is extremely important in terms of influence...and I appreciate the USG's independence of opinion."

18. (SBU) Embassy has identified several potentially strong voices that share the USG's focus on legislative elections within six months. These individuals also share a sense of urgency, fearing that the lack of leadership on the part of civil society will ultimately reinforce the CNDD's hold on power. Embassy is bringing these leaders together on January 23 to participate as panel speakers for the Embassy's monthly human rights working group meeting, which will focus on the role of civil society in a representative democracy. Our intent is to launch a discussion highlighting the need for greater unity and a common vision, which we can then

reinforce through other programs.

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COMMENT  
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19. (SBU) Civil society leadership is absolutely critical in this transition period, particularly in the early months. To date, there has been a general lack of cohesion in terms of a strategic vision, essentially reflecting the continued divisions among various societal groups, which ultimately enabled Conte and his entourage to hold onto power despite widespread discontent. Even among those who share the USG's emphasis on elections in six months, there are individuals pushing for side objectives, such as constitutional reform, which could be time consuming. The USG message is getting out there and civilians are receptive to U.S. leadership. We will continue to encourage greater cohesion among civil society leaders as the most effective tool for advancing a democratic agenda. END COMMENT.  
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